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Combat in Cities: The LA Riots and Operation Rio

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"They are . . . the post-modern equivalent of jungles and mountains--citadels of the dispossessed and irreconcilable. A military unprepared for urban operations across a broad spectrum is unprepared for tomorrow."¹

Ralph Peters
"Our Soldiers, Their Cities"

INTRODUCTION

The U.S. military experience during the 1992 Los Angeles Riots and the 1995 experience of the Brazilian Armed Forces in countering criminals in Rio de Janeiro offer insights for civilian and military leaders. These kinds of domestic support operations have made the military-law enforcement nexus an important dimension of today's national security environment. They underscore the importance of up-to-date procedures for interagency coordination, and renewed military doctrine and training.

Lawlessness and organized crime are increasingly necessary components of national security analysis and military planning.² For example, the U.S. National Security Strategy (NSS) of 1996 has identified international crime as a national security threat requiring the same military mission support previously extended to countering terrorism and illicit drugs. The Strategy projects an increasing linkage of military and law enforcement establishments in counter-crime missions.³

Criminal activity is woven into many security threats. Examples are weapons proliferation (including black market trading of nuclear material), the linkages of drug trafficking and other crime to terrorism and insurgency, illegal immigration, and areas in megacities where government control and services have eroded. Countering unlawful activities is not a new army mission, as remembered by President George Washington's response to the Pennsylvania Whiskey Rebellion of 1794.⁴ Contemporary events demonstrate that crime is increasingly threatening democratic governments as they try to cope with various dangers described above.⁵ In this paper, military support to domestic civil authorities is seen from the perspective of the American and Brazilian military leaders involved. These comparative experiences from two different environments offer some ideas about the roles of armed forces.

RESTORING PUBLIC ORDER IN LOS ANGELES

The April 1992 Los Angeles Riot spread widely across many parts of Los Angeles. When they were over, 54 persons were killed, 2,383 injured (221 critically), and 13,212 arrested. There were 11,113 fires, and damage was estimated at \$717 million for Los Angeles County. The riot lasted from the afternoon of April 29 through about the morning of May 4, 1992. The immediate cause of the riots was the acquittal in a state court of four police officers in the Rodney King case.

The repeated television broadcasts of the short version of the videotape of Rodney King's beating by police throughout the year leading up to the policemen's trial inflamed passions among some of the black population of LA. The black community had developed a long-standing dislike, even hatred, of the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) because of a long history of conflict between police and the black community. The live TV coverage of the police officers' acquittal, and subsequent coverage of the riot's first developments, poured gasoline on the fire. The failure of the LAPD to immediately move onto the streets to meet lawbreakers head-on was seen live on TV by would-be rioters who moved into unpoliced streets to loot and carry-on.⁶

Mayor Tom Bradley's comments immediately following the Rodney King acquittal day of the riot inadvertently contributed to the unsettled atmosphere: ". . . we will not tolerate the savage beating of our citizens by a few renegade cops."⁷ Editors of *U.S. News & World Report* suggest that alcohol, greed and hatred (along with police incompetence) helped fuel the rioting, armed attacks, and looting.⁸ "Many of the looters and shooters," observed a senior Army officer, "were using Rodney King as an excuse to rob, pillage, and kill."⁹ Yet, ethnic street gangs were the most serious challenges faced by law enforcement and the military during the riots. These were heavily armed groups of criminals who sniped at police and military personnel throughout the initial five days of the LA Riot.

Many misunderstood the LA Riot of 1992 as predominantly a race riot. As witnessed by the California National Guard Field Commander, the riots were seen as a case study in urban warfare.¹⁰ The Guard's counter-riot operations tell of the increasingly dangerous nature of military and police operations in the urban environment.

Black gangs (Bloods and Crips) met a few days before the riots to establish a truce so that they could devote their efforts toward killing Los Angeles police. The riots allowed them to assert their influence on the streets.¹¹ Later (on about 7 or 8 May, during the transition to normalcy), the organized gangs circulated a document calling for \$3.726 billion to be spent on a Bloods/Crips law enforcement program, an educational program, a Los Angeles urban renewal program, and a human welfare program. The gangs suggested that Drug Lords would reinvest their funds in the city, and they would provide matching funds for AIDS research and awareness. "Meet these demands and the targeting of police officers will stop," the gangs advised. By no means were the LA rioters all from black Bloods and Crips gangs. Over half of those arrested during the riots were Hispanics, and over a thousand of those were illegal immigrants, attesting to the inter-ethnic dynamic of the riot.¹²

Tracking the riots from their eruption on April 29 to Los Angeles County's return to routine lawlessness in mid-May offers some insights for civil-military cooperation and preparedness. Several issues affected military support to civil authorities, including command authority over state troops (federalization), military and civilian leadership.

OPERATIONAL CONSTRAINTS

Federalizing the Guard. During the initial hours of the riot, Warren Christopher (then chair of a citizen's commission concerning the Police Department), advised Mayor Bradley to call in the federal troops and place the National Guard troops under Federal command. By Christopher's reasoning things were getting out of control on the first night of the riot:

"The National Guard was very slow to move in and that's fairly typical too. The National Guard is not very effective in these situations."¹³

In fact, the Guard did not get orders to deploy until 2 p.m. on the 30th of April (second day). Nevertheless, the Guard was slowed during its initial deployment because of logistics mix-ups concerning ammunition and riot control equipment.¹⁴ Throughout the second day of the riot,

the civilian leadership became increasingly concerned about the riot's progress: 5,000 incidents, and 30 fires with 800 firefighters committed. It appeared to the Mayor and Governor that the National Guard was deploying too slowly to effectively handle the problem.¹⁵ So, the federal troops were called-for early on the third day.

By the time the federalization took effect, 4,000 Guard troops were already on the street supporting the LAPD and the Los Angeles Sheriff's Office (LASO).¹⁶ Ultimately, the Guard deployed 10,465 troops that were subsumed by Joint Task Force-Los Angeles Headquarters. JTF-LA was put together by the Regular Army's U.S. Forces Command in Atlanta which assigned 2,023 troops from the 7th Infantry Division and 1,508 Marines from Camp Pendleton. This was not much of an increase, but it was enough to put a federal officer in charge.

Once federalized under JTF-LA, the Guard was about 80 percent less responsive supporting law enforcement agencies.¹⁷ The reason was the Posse Comitatus Act, which has direct consequences for federal military forces.¹⁸ The Act's intent is to exclude the regular military forces (authorized under Title 10, U.S.Code) from domestic police activities. It does not apply to National Guard troops operating under the command of a State Governor (Title 32).¹⁹

The Joint Task Force chain of command required that law enforcement agency requests for assistance be subjected to a test to determine whether the requested assignment was a law enforcement or a military function. Regular military officers were concerned with breaking the law by being involved in law enforcement activities (although they were under a Presidential

State Area Command HQ

40th Infantry Division (M)(-)

- Division Troops

;;;;3 Brigades (5 Inf, 4 Armor Bn)

;;;;Military Police Bde (2 Bn)

;;;;Division Artillery (3 Bn)

;;;;Support Command (3 Bn)

Air National Guard

;;;;Airlift Wing (C130)

;;;;Rescue Group (Security Police)

;;;;Recon Group (Security Police)

;;;;Fighter Wing (Security Police)

Figure 1 - National Guard Troops,
10,456 Soldiers and Airmen.

Note: Bn=Battalion, Bde=Brigade,
M=Mechanized, Inf=Infantry,
HQ=Headquarters.

Order to restore law and order).²⁰ This was an unnecessary constraint because the Posse comitatus Act does not necessarily apply in cases of "a sudden and unexpected civil disturbance, disaster, or calamity . . ."²¹

In essence, federalization of the counter-riot effort resulted from the civilian leadership's lack of confidence in the California National Guard (CNG) and was reinforced by problems of military-police coordination and logistics mix-ups early during the riots. Also initially, the county emergency operations system had trouble directing troop employment and providing current information to the civic leaders. If federalization was a mistake, then it did not much matter because the worst rioting was finished by the time Federal officials took charge.

Rules of Engagement. Rules of engagement (ROE) normally facilitate the employment of forces by clearly identifying the constraints and circumstances under which the troops will conduct operations. But as federalization of the counter-riot mission evolved, some aspects of the ROE became unclear, constraining military operations.

7th Infantry Division (Light) HQ

;;;;;;;;- **Military Police Company**
;;;;;;;;- **Aviation Elements**
;;;;;;;;- **1 Brigade Headquarters**
;;;;;;;;- **3 Infantry Battalions**
;;;;;;;;- **Support Command HQ**
;;;;;;;;- **1 Support Battalion**

Marine Air-Ground Task Force

;;;;;;;;- **1 Marine Battalion**
;;;;;;;;- **1 Light Armored Infantry Bn**
;;;;;;;;- **1 Military Police Company**
;;;;;;;;- **Engineer Elements**
;;;;;;;;- **Marine Air Group Elements**

Figure 2 - Active Component Troops,
2,023 Soldiers, 1,508 Marines.

The "Arming Order" given by Joint Task Force-Los Angeles Commander Major General Marvin L. Covault, an active component officer, has been described as problematic by the CNG Field Commander, Major General James D. Delk. The Guard had been on the streets of Los Angeles fully armed (Arming Order 5, AO-5) and demonstrating fire discipline and restraint under fire for about four days when the Federal troop commander arrived on the scene and ordered that they sling arms and put away their ammunition (AO 1). (And Marine units were to go on the street in units no smaller than platoon size.) According to General Delk:

"When questioned about it [AO-1], the JTF-LA leadership explained that [the] order should not be interpreted literally . . . We finally met with folks at JTF-LA, who explained again that what the order said was not what they really meant. We pressed for them to revise their order to say what they meant. They promised to do that, but their Staff Judge Advocate officers (military lawyers) were "still working the issue" some days later when the 7th Infantry Division returned to Fort Ord."²²

Delk has concluded that this was ". . . a Cover Your Ass (CYA) measure just in case someone killed somebody in error." More than a leadership problem, this illustrates the military's failure to confront the compelling and contradictory issue of urban combat in a peacetime environment.

Leadership Issues. National Guard and Federal military leadership may be seen as wanting, but military observers and the media reported a vacancy of coordinated and forthright civilian leadership during the LA riots as well. They suggest that as events unfolded, this interfered with

guidance from civil authorities to the military.²³ Well known is the long-standing mistrust and dislike between Los Angeles Mayor Tom Bradley (a former police officer) and Chief of the LAPD, Daryl F. Gates. The Mayor and Chief had not spoken to each other in over a year prior to the riot. In addition, the Los Angeles Police Chief did not get along with the County Sheriff.²⁴ Three hours after the President announced on television that he would federalize the CNG troops, the LA Mayor's staff contacted the State Governor's staff to enlist help in thwarting efforts by the LA Chief of Police and the Sheriff to delay the deployment of federal troops into the city.²⁵ The leadership was in disarray.

Governor Wilson (with Mayor Bradley) called for federalization of the counter-riot effort without consulting with the National Guard commanders in charge on the scene. This reflected the schism that had been brewing between the Governor and his National Guard for months if not years. General Delk describes a Governor who had not visited his National Guard in the field and did not allow the Adjutant General, Major General Bob Thrasher, direct access to the Governor's office. Delk observed that this worked to their mutual disadvantage when tensions rose at the beginning of the riots of 1992:

"... politics and egos had a significant impact on various important decisions made during the riots ... Sometimes senior officials merely wanted to appear fully "in charge," or posture themselves to take maximum advantage of the incredible numbers of media personnel in the area. At other times, decisions were made to help justify more questionable decisions made previously."²⁶

The bickering that attended the LA riots contributed to the difficulties that bedeviled CNG and Regular Army commanders operating in the politically charged interagency environment.²⁷ The decision to federalize the CNG caused great anxiety among the Guard troops.

OPERATIONAL CONCEPT AND TACTICS

Troops were not deployed in wedge formations to break up demonstrations at the town square in the manner most old soldiers once rehearsed. In LA (as most modern cities) the town square is no longer the focal point for protest, a situation that once lent itself to classical crowd control procedures.²⁸ The technologies of communications and transportation and the control architecture of security-conscious street and building design have changed the nature of the civil disturbance threat--perhaps for the worse. The control architecture that accompanied the renaissance of downtown LA after the 1965 Watts riots gave rise to what architect Mike Davis called "the physical segregation of the new core and its land values behind a rampart of regraded palisades, concrete pillars and freeway walls."²⁹ In the Riots of 1992, the center business district remained mostly secure while the neighborhoods were at risk.

Arson investigators later announced that 565 arson fires were set and thirty individuals were arrested for arson throughout the riots. Remarkably, 55 of the first 57 buildings set on fire were owned by Koreans. Because of the absence of police, neighborhood gun stores could not be secured. One gun store lost 1,150 firearms during the first night of the riot.³⁰ The large numbers of small arms weapons present on the streets created a difficult environment for police and soldiers.

Lieutenant Colonel William Wenger, Commanding the 3rd Battalion, 160th Infantry (Mechanized) (the first tactical battalion deployed) described his initial missions:

"Company B patrolled east Los Angeles, while Company C patrolled blacked-out malls and streets in Compton and Watts. Company D reported to the Hall of Justice downtown to protect the jail as well as city and government buildings . . . Company A (reinforced) was sent to a prison 40 miles northeast of L.A. where 1,500 prisoners had rioted . . ." ³¹

Such missions provided a visible presence of respected authority on the streets throughout LA, but made command and control difficult. (By-in-large, the National Guard troops were well respected, even by the gangs.) On the second and later days of the riots, when the LAPD began to move back into contested areas, such dispersed troop deployments maintained an authoritative presence at street corners and provided a necessary back up to police teams.

As events continued to unfold, CNG troops were commonly assigned to tasks individually or in small groups by the civilian authorities running the County's Emergency Operations Center. The Governor's *Harrison Report* on the riots found that "This resulted in individual soldiers being committed to a very volatile situation, performing duties for which they were not specifically trained, without benefit of their accustomed leadership, and in many cases without the ability to communicate with other soldiers or units, and with live ammunition chambered in their rifles." ³²

Military operations during the Los Angeles riots were reactive. The National Guard (and later the Regular Army and Marines) responded in support of the operational design of civilian leadership. Yet, the County's Emergency Operations Center (the civil-military command post) was slow to get established and did not provide the kind of coherent operational direction that would facilitate unit employment. Local law enforcement organizations had planned inadequately for civil disturbance missions to assign to the military. When the riots came, the Operations Center parceled-out troops throughout the city as called for by the police.

RESULTS OF THE LA RIOTS

Little good came out of the events of the LA riots of 1992. Nearly everyone looked bad, except for the individual soldiers, firemen and policemen who performed selflessly throughout the difficult week of rioting.

The social and economic scars remain in central Los Angeles where Bloods and Crips gangs continue drug trafficking. The LA riot of 1992 largely burnt itself out, but ". . . the possibility for further civil disturbances is considerable in urban areas of California," concludes an after action assessment of the riots. With other large cities also at risk, it seems sensible to consider lessons from the LA riots.

LESSONS FROM THE LA RIOTS

By the time of the 1992 riots, State and National Guard officials had allowed planning and exercising for civil disturbance contingencies to deteriorate. The need for a continuous series of exercises that rehearse actions, establish legal parameters, set-up agreed intelligence links, and

designate command relationships was dramatically indicated by the riots. Trained civilian leaders are critical to success. Plans and exercises should include all potential contributing agencies. The failure to adequately plan and rehearse predestined that interagency cooperation would suffer during the 1992 L.A. riot.

Ineffective interagency cooperation plagued the counter-riot efforts, both in contingency planning for civil disturbances and during the actual LA riots of 1992. The civilian command and control system was sometimes slow to respond with coherent direction to the supporting military. "Along with the CNG's unpreparedness, this lack of well-thought-out missions for the CNG troops in a civil disturbance situation contributed to the delay in getting significant CNG troops on the street in a timely manner on April 29th and 30th."³³ The bickering among key civilian leaders (before and during the riot) was a factor that frustrated effective CNG employment, as did distrust between the CNG and Federal military Task Force. With neither effective prior planning nor interagency cooperation, unity of effort was not achieved.

Finally, the riots showed that National Guard and Federal troops will need to be better equipped for future civil disturbance operations. Radios suitable for the city environment, personal protective equipment, and less lethal means of dealing with well-armed criminal gangs are required in sufficient numbers to support police and military involved in a large civil disturbance.³⁴

Two years later, Brazilian officers of the Eastern Military Command were only generally aware of the 1992 Los Angeles experience when they received the order to regain control over parts of Rio de Janeiro. With twenty days lead time, a three-month campaign against criminal urban guerrillas was planned and conducted. The counter-crime initiative was named "Operation Rio."

RESTORING PUBLIC ORDER: OPERATION RIO

Operation Rio was a military operation conducted November 1994 through January 1995 by the Brazilian Armed Forces to restore public order in the city of Rio de Janeiro so that government control and services could be re-established.³⁵ One of the main objectives of Operation Rio was to make Rio de Janeiro a safer, more reliable place. "We wanted to prevent groups of criminals from continuing to hold the residents of Rio de Janeiro hostage . . . [and] . . . this objective . . . [was] achieved," said Army Colonel Ivan Cardoso.³⁶ The operation was an experiment employing the Armed Forces in an urban environment to support constituted civil authorities. The area of operations was Brazil's most famous city.

Rio de Janeiro is a major cultural, political and trading center on the coast of Brazil. It was the capital city of Brazil until 1961 when Brazil moved its capital to the newly constructed inland city of Brasilia. Today, Rio de Janeiro serves as the capital of the state of Rio de Janeiro, and it continues as an important and modern city of 12 million people.

Rio is a city of great beauty, but it is marked by extreme geographic and social contrasts. Its irregular topography, with mountains cascading precipitously to the ocean, have influenced the social organization of the city. A wealthy social class resides along the beaches; in contrast, the poor live close by in *favelas* (ghettos or slums) built on the mountains of the inner parts of Rio.³⁷

Because of the lack of government services, organized crime has been able to thrive in the *favelas*, often aided by an unmotivated and ineffective state police force.

Of the 600 or so ghettos in Rio, 20 or 30 were outside government control at the start of Operation Rio.³⁸ For example, Robertinho de Lucas, leader of the gang called the "Third Command," exemplifies a number of gang leaders that dominate districts in northern Rio. Robertinho is famous for distributing food, medicine, and money to slum dwellers in the areas he controls as a form of social assistance.³⁹ His Third Command contends with the widely known "Red Command" and other gangs for influence and control in the *favelas*. As Operation Rio unfolded, it became evident that the gangs did not have an integrated command structure as the Armed Forces initially suspected.

Criminal organizations such as the Red Command and Third Command have been able to establish territories under their control by winning-over the population in slum areas where government control and services do not exist. The situation has created criminal enclaves where modern and powerful small arms smuggled into Rio from other countries are used to repel any police who might cross into these lawless districts. The police are often in cahoots with these criminal organizations.

By 1994, the situation had deteriorated significantly, and political leaders from the President to the Mayor wanted to do something about it. In the three years leading-up to Operation Rio, "stray bullets hit 50 people, of whom 13 died, while two girls were paralyzed."⁴⁰ Urban violence highlighted by bank robberies, drugtraffickers' turf wars, and armed assaults in the streets created a frightening climate of insecurity. At night, red tracer bullets marked the locations of shoot-outs, creating an atmosphere of terror in Rio de Janeiro.

Because of the public outcry and the inability of the State Government to maintain public order, the Brazilian Federal Government ordered the employment of the Armed Forces to support civil authorities. With Presidential authorization, the Brazilian Minister of the Army designated the Eastern Military Commander as the General Commander of Operations starting November 1, 1994. The tasks were to reestablish government authority; reduce urban violence; and provide security and safety to the population of Rio.

OPERATIONAL CONSTRAINTS

Planning was guided by several restrictive imperatives established by the Federal Government. These factors became a foundation for concepts of operations and the tactical rules of engagement later issued to the troops.

Institutional Normalcy. The Rio operation was to be conducted in an environment of institutional (constitutional) normalcy. There would be no decree of a state of defense (emergency) or other legality that could significantly restrict the freedom of action of the population. Conversely, this legal status restricted how the Armed Forces could be employed against the criminal urban guerrilla.

That is, the troops operated more as police than as a warfighting force. Military combat techniques gave way to "police actions." It was a special point of emphasis for Rio planners that the reputation of the Armed Forces not be sullied by human rights transgressions. Innocent people were not to become casualties of the operation.

In conducting police actions, the Brazilian Armed Forces were not constrained by law in the same sense as are the U.S. Army and Air Force under the U.S. Posse Comitatus Act. Yet Brazilian soldiers enjoyed no legal impunity during the operation. To conduct a search for instance, the Armed Forces had to obtain a court order. A Brazilian military liaison officer was established with the State Justice Department Tribunal, and the Justice Department made available a group of 12 judges to provide rapid support for the operation.

The judges facilitated search warrants, and oversaw temporary arrest and incarceration procedures.⁴¹ Throughout these procedures, the military command maintained active contact with the city administration and the press. Ultimately, the very tight rules of engagement issued to the Armed Forces prevented incidents harmful to the morale and public image of the military.

Limited Time-frame. The Eastern Military Command planned the Rio mission for a short duration. It would allow about three months to gain an immediate impact on the criminal organizations and return control of contested areas back to local government. There was the potential that a long term involvement in supporting police actions could diminish the combat readiness of the troops. However, military planners acknowledged that the limited time-span of Operation Rio could allow for the ascendancy of criminal gangs after the troops were withdrawn from the *favelas*. In fact, sequels to the Rio Operation have been required through 1995.⁴²

Sustain Legitimacy. An important measure of success for the Armed Forces leadership was the idea that popular support for the legitimacy of the civil government and the prestige of the Armed Forces would be enhanced as a result of the operation. Conducting operations under a state of institutional normalcy helped the Army realize this goal. Yet, from the outset there were problems to be overcome. The peoples' lack of trust in the state police interfered with gathering intelligence about organized crime that could help the Armed Forces. Further, it was difficult to maintain the confidentiality of military operations within the city.

Lack of Information. Military leaders needed to identify gang leaders, their homes and safe houses, in order to apprehend drug traffickers and other criminals. The military was tasked to fight a criminal guerrilla with drugtrafficking ties. The criminal guerrillas were organized in heavily armed gangs, but without any true central command. "We thought they were more organized than they really are . . . Pablo Escobar was [had been] in Rio with the support of the CV [Red Command], but this did not prove meaningful," advised the operations officer for Operation Rio.⁴³

The police had not established a useful criminal intelligence system. The Eastern Military Command had to develop an interagency intelligence system. They created an intelligence division staffed with personnel from the service schools and civilian analysts with experience with subversion.

OPERATIONAL CONCEPT AND TACTICS

**5 ARMY BATTALIONS (4 Inf, 1 Police)
2 MARINE BATTALIONS
2 UNIFORMED STATE POLICE SWAT
;;;;;; ;;;; ;;;BATTALIONS
1 ARMY HELICOPTER SQUADRON
1 AIR FORCE POLICE BATTALION
1 AF COMBAT SEARCH & RESCUE
;;;;;; ;;;; ;;;SQUADRON
CIVIL AND FEDERAL POLICE
SPECIAL OPERATIONS TASK
;;;;;; ;;;; ;;;FORCE (JOINT)
INTELLIGENCE (JOINT & INTERAGENCY)**

Figure 3 - Operation Rio Forces

To support the detailed planning process and provide command and control over Operation Rio, the military established an Operations Center at the Eastern Military Command under the coordinating authority of Brigadier General Roberto Jughurta Camara Senna. There, the staff functions were established. He organized the staff into operations, intelligence, logistics, communications, legal and public affairs sections. The Eastern Military Command allotted forces from all services to make-up the task force organization. These are seen in Figure 3. For the duration of the operation, the military leadership had operational authority over

civilian and military elements. This unity of command was achieved because the Brazilian President and the State Governor placed Federal and State Police elements under the operational control of the Eastern Military Command to ensure a unity of effort.

General Senna designed Operation Rio with three overlapping phases of operations identified conceptually as "Isolate," "Police," and "Combat." Within the plan for Operation Rio, Eastern Military Command officers developed concepts for operations throughout the three-month period. The Armed Forces would cut-off routes for criminal groups, weapons and drugs in and out of Rio de Janeiro. They would provide maximum show of troop presence in the streets to encourage a feeling of security in the population.

The troops would patrol in areas infested by drug dealers (who typically have points of sale in the *favelas*) and the drug users (who move from various parts of the city to these sales points). The idea was to reduce drug purchases and consequently, the traffickers' sources of income.

The Armed Forces conducted large-scale sweeps. These were in the drug traffickers' enclaves in the slum areas to establish authority and to create law and order. The sweeps established conditions under which the state police force could reorganize and effectively reassume constitutional responsibilities for public safety.

A specific military action was planned and conducted for each phase of the operation. The Isolate Phase was named *Granito* (Granite); the Police Phase was *Rubi* (Ruby); and the Combat Phase was *Topazio* (Topaz).

Granito was to control land, sea, and air access routes into the State of Rio de Janeiro to isolate of the city from criminal organizations and their contraband. This was to be accomplished both in the city's environs and throughout the State. About 300 federal troops established check points and conducted highway patrols. Cargo control was established at the major airports. Small aircraft traffic was controlled at secondary airfields by the Brazilian Air Force.

Drug and weapons control at seaports and coastal areas was coordinated by the Navy. As *Granito* developed, the Navy assigned its Naval Intelligence Service and six fast patrol boats to counter drug and arms smuggling along the coast of Rio de Janeiro State and Guanabara Bay. Naval patrols also covered the coastal areas of Espirito Santo and Sao Paulo States to the north and south of Rio.⁴⁴

The Armed Forces and police maintained continuous surveillance of fifteen access routes into Rio de Janeiro. The road check points became an important means against criminals fleeing Rio de Janeiro along coastal highways. To the north in Espirito Santo State, the State Security Secretary increased security after the migration of criminal gangs from Rio resulted in two kidnappings and a bank holdup. In Parana State to the south, 30 armed police searched buses and cars, looking for criminals smuggling arms southward toward Argentina and Uruguay.⁴⁵

Rubi directed the Armed Forces units to establish a series of intensive street patrols within the city in areas not patrolled by the police. Its goals were to provide security for the people, and harass the drug dealers by interposing a barrier of soldiers between drug vendors in the *favelas* and their customers from other parts of the city.

While the police conducted routine city patrol duties, the *Rubi* task force of some 500 men conducted daily squad-sized patrols throughout critical areas in the city. These areas were near established check points in the business parts of Rio and locations close to the *favelas*. Each day, from two to four company- or battalion-sized search and seizure raids were conducted in high crime locations. Throughout the three months of Operation Rio, 80 such missions of eight to twelve hours duration were conducted. One of these was conducted by troops of the 1st Armored Regiment.

At 1700 hours, 23 December, the 1st Armored Regiment Task Force (TF) began an isolation of the Morro do Alemão favela. The interagency TF included Uniformed State Police and a "SWAT" team armed with light weapons (pistols and rifles) and some wheeled light armored vehicles. At 2000 hours elements of the TF came under heavy fire from a group of criminals using AR-15 (5.56mm) rifles against the soldiers. The TF commander placed emphasis on fire discipline to minimize collateral damage as much as possible. But then the urban guerrillas counterattacked the TF using grenades and 7mm submachineguns.

The firefight lasted about 30 minutes as did another later that evening. "The bad guys seemed to have endless amounts of ammunition," said the TF commander. After the firefights, the police arrested 16 criminals. Numerous weapons were captured along with stolen merchandise. Five stolen vehicles were recovered.⁴⁶

Topazio committed brigade-sized troop formations (three to six battalions) in areas controlled by well-organized criminal groups. About 1500 Armed Forces personnel were directly involved in *Topazio*. These actions were conducted in densely populated areas of fifty to eighty thousand low-income workers and jobless folks. The citizens of these areas are mostly honest people living close to the criminals, and often protecting them because of the fear of retribution.

The *Topazio* concept included using maximum surprise in continuous operations of 48 to 72 hours. Because these operations included large numbers of personnel from the military and other government agencies, the planning and conduct of Topaz was complex. *Topazio* became a high-profile endeavor which captured the interest of the news media, non-governmental organizations, and the general public. This was due to the large size of the federal force and the nature of the opposing criminal force.

During *Topazio*, the opposing criminal force included groups of 50 to 100 men that had full knowledge of the terrain. They had prepared defensive positions with dominating fields of fire covering avenues of approach to and within their protected domains. Criminal force weapons typically included M16, AR15, and FAL semi-automatic rifles and automatic weapons such as the UZI sub-machine gun. Applying guerrilla war tactics, these groups usually avoided decisive battle, prudently concealing their weapons when needed, and mixing with the population.

TOPAZIO TACTICS

During the roughly three months of *Topazio*, the Armed Forces conducted eleven brigade-sized actions. A typical brigade task organization is shown in Figure 4. The infantry, with mechanized vehicle support, was used to surround an operating zone ("the red area"). Two battalions of uniformed State Police conducted area patrols and house by house searches to locate illicit drugs, weapons, and criminals. Commando teams from the Army, Marine Corps and Uniformed State Police seized selected objectives (often called "targets") within the red area. The Army Helicopter Platoon provided observation, command and control and logistics support. Women's Auxiliary Police, State Fire Department teams, and other civilian police officers supported the task force.

2 - Inf Battalions
1 - Mechanized Inf Company
10-15 - Army Commando Teams & Police
;;;;;SWAT Teams
2 - Uniformed State Police Battalions
1 - Army Helicopter Platoon Interagency
;;;;;Personnel

Figure 4 - Combat Phase: Example Brigade Task Force

Special Operations Forces (SOF) also participated in *Topazio*. Army, Marines, Air Force Search and Rescue Squadron, Police (SWAT) and Special Forces teams provided a rapid response force throughout the city. The force was linked to the intelligence network which enjoyed a significant boost from an anonymous phone reporting system (the "Criminal Hot Line") that was advertised to the general public. Two or three SOF missions were conducted daily. Most missions were search and seizure involving locating and searching drug and weapons depots, and capturing criminal leaders.

For each large action during *Topazio*, two advanced triage points were established on the scene to conduct preliminary questioning and to record events. Detainees were then taken to a central police station where specialized civilian police and legal officers had established offices. They conducted investigations and legal proceedings at the central station without overwhelming the court system.

THE RESULTS

For nearly three months, the Brazilian Armed Forces operated under the close scrutiny of the news media. Operation Rio occupied numerous newspaper headlines and television reports. The media, human rights organizations, and the lawyers of drug criminals publicized controversial events or opinions. On occasion, the media leaked confidential plans for counterdrug operations.

The results of this unique military-police operation were remarkable. Officials stated that there was an immediate decrease in bank robberies, car thefts, gang shoot-outs, drug trafficking, and weapons smuggling in the city and state during Operation Rio. Of about 500 suspects arrested, some 200 were put in jail to await their trials. Operation Rio troops recovered approximately 200 FAL, AR15 and M16 semiautomatic rifles, 100 submachine guns, and 500 hand guns.

During Operation Rio, the efforts of the Armed Forces restored confidence and trust in public authorities. According to press-sponsored public opinion polls, 90 percent of the population favored Operation Rio, with 80 percent asserting that crime had decreased noticeably with the visible presence of the Brazilian Armed Forces.⁴⁷ Throughout the operation, no innocent bystander was injured or killed. The military effort had set the conditions that would allow State Government an opportunity to reorganize the State Police and assume its responsibilities for public safety.

However, Operation Rio presented a number of difficulties for the Armed Forces. The political decision to maintain a state of institutional normalcy (that is, the absence of a declared state of emergency or martial law) was a limiting factor. In essence, service personnel operated as if they were citizens with some limited police powers, but they did not enjoy the legal status of soldiers in a theater of war.

For each Armed Forces arrest, the military member who made the arrest had to participate in the entire legal process, including serving as a prosecution witness. This exposed him to accusations from the prisoner and his family, and scrutiny from the media. Consequently, the performance of young soldiers who worried about these matters was sometimes inhibited. The presence of judges, lawyers, district attorneys, and news media, demanding to know the fate and the treatment given to the prisoners, required extra time and manpower. After Operation Rio was over, the continuing legal proceedings kept soldiers from their units for several months.

Finally, the main organized crime "drug lords" got out of the city before Operation Rio got underway. There was little opportunity to significantly cripple the leadership of the criminal gangs.

THE LESSONS FROM RIO

The detailed planning conducted by General Senna and his officers assured the Eastern Military Command a high probability of success in Operation Rio. This was seen both in the effective joint Armed Forces operations, but sound planning also spilled-over into the interagency arena.

The initial agreements between President, State Governor and the Rio Mayor respected the principle of unity of command. In turn, this permitted a unity of effort throughout the operation. The Eastern Military Command was the lead agency for Operation Rio. This ensured the integration of interagency resources during military operations in accordance with Brazilian Constitutional law and social norms.

These factors contributed to the integration of interagency skills and resources. The Rio operation demonstrated how planning and unity of command (someone in charge) can lead to effective interagency cooperation.

The operation also indicated that highly trained, well-disciplined troops are important. However, in challenging the criminal urban guerrilla, soldiers and police need equipment especially designed for this unique environment. Non-lethal types of offensive weapons and up-to-date protective gear are needed to counter the heavily armed criminal, while insuring that innocent by-standers are not harmed.

CONCLUSIONS

These examples of military operations in urban terrain suggest considerations for domestic support operations. Foremost is the problem of getting organized. From the outset, the Brazilians enjoyed unity of command, and this resulted in unity of effort throughout Operation Rio. In the context of the Brazilian culture, success was derived by anticipating legal considerations and by the early construction of interagency relationships. As a result, legitimacy of civil authority and a positive public image of the military were preserved.

During the course of the Los Angeles riots, fractured relations among leaders of the CNG, the Federal military, civil government, and police and sheriff's departments became evident. In LA, unity of command and unity of effort were achieved in only the most generous sense. Public confidence in civilian and military institutions faded.

The Brazilian Armed Forces and civil leaders were able to plan several weeks in advance to ensure an integrated, civil-military effort. Some of the shortcomings observed in the Los Angeles circumstance can be attributed to the emergency nature of the riots, but situations like the LA riots can be anticipated. In the LA event, National Guard and Federal military missions suffered because of a lack of planning and interagency cooperation.

Domestic support operations in Rio and LA indicate a need for new thinking about training and organizing soldiers to counteract modern-day criminals in urban terrain. Equally important is the immediate need for new equipment such as suitable communications and non-lethal weapons.

It may be that U.S. Federal military forces cannot be effectively used for missions supporting law enforcement much beyond a service-support role, and that the better solution is to well-equip the National Guard physically and legally to handle these situations. As for Federal troops, the distraction of special training, the legal strictures that apply to Federal military forces, and the need to focus limited resources on their warfighting mission, suggest that the Regulars are not the best troops for the job.

Perhaps there is time for military leaders to develop appropriate doctrine, equipment and training procedures for combat against the criminal urban guerrilla. Operation Rio and the LA riots provide lessons by showing that traditional ways of thinking about civil disturbances need renewal.

Endnotes

1. Ralph Peters, Major, U.S. Army, "Our Soldiers, Their Cities," *Parameters* XXVI No. 1 (Spring 1996): 43.[BACK](#)
2. Graham H. Turbiville, Jr., "The Organized Crime Dimension of Regional Conflict and Operations Other Than War," *Ethnic Conflict and Regional Instability: Implications for U.S. Policy and Army Roles and Missions*, ed. Robert L Pfaltzgraff, Jr., and Richard H. Shultz, Jr. (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: Strategic Studies Institute, 1994), 125. This article describes the criminal content of insurgency, civil war, and ethnic conflict and the impact of crime on military operations other than war. As evidenced by the 1996 *National Security Strategy*, it rightly predicted that U.S. interests will be ". . . increasingly affected by security concerns that are shaped substantially by organized crime . . .," 139.[BACK](#)
3. William J. Clinton, *A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement* (Washington, D.C.: February 1996), 25.[BACK](#)
4. Robin Higham, *Bayonets in the Streets* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1969). This volume reviews the history of the use of U.S. Army and National Guard in curbing civil disturbances.[BACK](#)
5. In the post-Soviet era, central state authority is on the decline in many countries, and criminal enterprises have gained advantage because of outdated legal regimes, information and transportation technologies. One result is the criminality has had an increasing affect upon established military organizations. This includes additional missions to support law authorities along with the corruption of military establishments. See Graham H. Turbiville, Jr., *Mafia in Uniform, The "Criminalization of the Russian Armed Forces* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Foreign Military Studies Office, July 1995). Also, Turbiville, "Operations Other Than War: Organized Crime Dimension," *Military Review* LXXIV, No.4 (January 1994): 35-47. Dr. Timothy L. Sanz provides a source list in "Organized Crime in the Russian Federation and Eastern Europe: Research Sources," *Low Intensity Conflict & Law Enforcement*, 3 No. 2 (Autumn 1994): 368-77.[BACK](#)
6. Ted Rohrlich and Rich Connell, "Police Pullout, Riot's Outbreak Reconstructed," *Los Angeles Times*, 5 May 1992, A1; see also Kenneth Reich and Stephanie Chavez, "LAPD Response Made No Sense, Block Says," *Los Angeles Times*, 6 May 1992, A1. Block was the Los Angeles County Sheriff who said the LAPD lent an aura of legitimacy to the looting by failing to take rapid action.[BACK](#)
7. *U.S. News & World Report* (May 31, 1993) 39. Mayor Bradley's comments were also significant because he was a former police officer.[BACK](#)

8. *U.S. News & World Report*, 35. See also "A potent brew: Booze and crime," pp. 57-8: "It was no coincidence that when the riot did erupt, both looters and arsonists made liquor stores a prime target." ". . . South Central [L.A.] had a staggering 728 licensed liquor outlets--13 per square mile." [BACK](#)

9. William V. Wenger, Colonel, California Army National Guard, letter to author, 14 March 1996. Colonel Wenger commanded a battalion participating in the LA Riot of 1992. [BACK](#)

10. Delk. Major General Delk was the Military Field Commander for the Los Angeles riots in April-May 1992 until the troops were Federalized. [BACK](#)

11. Louis Sahagun and Leslie Berger, "Some Gang Members Agreeing to A Truce," *Los Angeles Times*, 6 May 1992, A9; see also Delk, *Fires and Furies*. On the first night of the riots there were numerous armed attacks on police and the military. General Delk catalogues 57 such attacks between 1 May (second full day of riots) and 7 May. Attacks typically consisted of snipers and drive-by shootings using semi-automatic and automatic weapons, 352. At the time of the 1992 riots, there were approximately 60 sets of Blood Gangs, 110 Crip sets, 250 Hispanic gang sets, and 15 sets of Asian gangs in the Los Angeles area. [BACK](#)

12. The *U.S. News & World Report* adds that 51 percent of the 5,000 arrested were Latino and 79 percent of Latino looters were foreign-born; 38 percent of arrestee were black. "Half of the 694 felons were homeless or had been at their residences for less than a year; 66 percent were unemployed, and 60 percent had criminal records. A stunning 3 out of 5 had dropped out of high school." 55. [BACK](#)

13. William H. Harrison, *Report to the Honorable Pete Wilson, Governor, State of California: Assessment of the Performance of the California National Guard During the Civil Disturbances in Los Angeles, April and May 1992 [The Harrison Report]* (Sacramento, California: 2 October 1992), 23. The *Report* states: "Mr. Warren Christopher, [then] a private citizen, first broached the subject of federal troops to the Mayor's staff when he became concerned about the slowness of the CNG's [California National Guard] deployment on the streets. Mr. Christopher had been intimately involved in the McCone study of the Watts [Los Angeles] riots in 1965, and he expressed a concern that past mistakes not be repeated." [BACK](#)

14. Daniel M. Weintraub, "Guard Action Delayed by Organization Glitches," *Los Angeles Times*, 1 May 1992, A12; also, Rich Connell and Jim Newton, "Guard Takes Positions After Delays, Snafus," *Los Angeles Times*, 2 May 1992, A1. At issue were 5.56mm ammunition for M16 rifles, .45 caliber pistol ammunition, riot batons, flack vests, and face shields. To facilitate the deployment, ammunition was taken from the CNG Counterdrug Task Force Grizzly (at Los Alamitos) and given to deploying troops. The late arrival of ammunition and civil disturbance gear were major causes for the inability of the California National Guard to deploy rapidly and efficiently. See also *Harrison Report*, 27. [BACK](#)

15. By 8 p.m. on the second day (Thursday, 30 April), there were 1,000 National Guard troops deployed. The State Governor requested federal troops from the President at 1:15 a.m. on Friday, 1 May 1992 (by then, the Guard had 1,500 troops performing 19 separate missions). [BACK](#)

16. According to the Harrison Report, at 6 p.m. Friday, 1 May, the President announced federalization of CNG troops and deployment of Regular Army and Marines; Governor Wilson informed the CNG Adjutant General at 6:25.[BACK](#)

17. Geoffrey B. Demarest, *The Strategic Implications of Operational Law* (Leavenworth, Kansas: Foreign Military Studies Office, 1995) provides discussion of impact of domestic and international law on military operations. See also *Harrison Report*, 24-5.[BACK](#)

18. 18 United States Code 1385, Posse Comitatus Act. "Whoever, except in cases and under circumstances expressly authorized by the Constitution or Act of Congress, willfully uses any part of the Army or Air force as a Posse Comitatus or otherwise to execute the laws shall be fined no more than \$10,000 or imprisoned not more than two years, or both." Also, the Act is understood to apply to personnel and not to military equipment or facilities.[BACK](#)

19. National Guard military regulations follow the spirit of the Posse Comitatus Act, but the guard is not bound by the limitations of the Act.[BACK](#)

20. *Harrison Report*, 24-5: "The deployment of federal troops and the federalization of the CNG received less favorable reviews [from law enforcement agencies]. While in State status, CNG responded to every recorded request for assistance from local law enforcement. Once the CNG went into Federal status, records indicate their response to request from local law enforcement was reduced to about 20 percent. This reduction was attributed primarily to the restrictions placed in Federal troops under the provisions of the Posse comitatus Act. . . . the CNG was more responsive to local law enforcement while in state status than they were once they were federalized."[BACK](#)

21. U.S. Army, FM 100-19, *Domestic Support Operations*, Washington: July 1, 1993, 3-2.[BACK](#)

22. Delk, p. 200. Appendix 2 of *Fires & Furies*, pp. 341-3, provides Rules of Engagement and Arming Orders (AO). AO-1 was rifle at sling-arms, bayonet in scabbard, pistol holstered, baton on belt, magazine in pouch, rifle chamber empty, and officer or NCO in charge. By contrast, AO-5 was rifle at port-arms, bayonet fixed, pistol in hand, baton in hand, magazine in weapon, chamber empty, officer or NCO in charge. [BACK](#)

23. For examples of this theme see: Tim Rutten, "A Divided Los Angeles Rages Across the Abyss," B7; and David Freed and Ted Rohrlich, "LAPD Slow in Coping With Wave of Unrest," A1; in *Los Angeles Times*, 1 May 1992. Also "LAPD Response Made No Sense, Block Says," *Los Angeles Times*, 6 May 1992. See also James D. Delk, "Chapter Fourteen, Politics, Egos, and Controversy," *Fires and Furies: The L.A. Riots*.[BACK](#)

24. Sheriff Sherman Block was the senior law officer in Los Angeles County. It was Block's Emergency Operations Center (EOC) that eventually assumed operational control.[BACK](#)

25. *Harrison Report*, A-29. [BACK](#)

26. James D. Delk, *Fires & Furies: The L.A. Riots* (Palm Springs, CA: ETC Publications, 1995), 291.[BACK](#)

27. It is not comforting to note that a similar incident of political bickering attended the 1967 Detroit riot. The admixture of politicians then included Republican Governor George Romney of Michigan, bickering with Democrats-- Vice-President Hubert Humphrey, U.S. Attorney-General Ramsey Clark, and Mayor Jerome Cavanaugh of Detroit. See Higham, *Bayonets in the Streets*, ". . . [P]arty affiliations, the approach of a presidential election, and . . . an unfamiliar legal situation . . . were sufficient ingredients for a partisan battle . . . "189.[BACK](#)

28. For example, troops could block access along main thoroughfares or "push" mobs into into side streets, dispersing them away from the focal point of activity. [BACK](#)

29. Mike Davis, *Urban Control: The Ecology of Fear* (Westfield, New Jersey: Open Magazine Pamphlet Series, 1994), 4. See also Geoffrey B. Demarest, "Geopolitics and Urban Armed conflict in Latin America," *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 6 No. 1 (Spring 1995), 44-67. Both authors offer insights about urban terrain that can be useful to military planners for operations in support of civil authorities.[BACK](#)

30. *U.S. News & World Report*, 53.[BACK](#)

31. Colonel William V. Wenger, "The Los Angeles Riots, A Battalion Commander's Perspective," *Infantry* (January-February 1994): 14. [BACK](#)

32. *Harrison Report*, 26.[BACK](#)

33. *Harrison Report*, 4.[BACK](#)

34. Wenger letter. Colonel Wenger suggests appropriate mission equipment: Individual AM radios; re-transmission capability; night vision devices, one per squad; ground surveillance radar; sound and motion sensors; body armor and protective gear for urban warfare; integrated Army air support; appropriate weapons (Heckler & Koch MP 5 sub-machine gun, Shotguns, Mark 19 grenade launchers with non-lethal and standard ammo; and maps. [BACK](#)

35. Dates of the military operation were 31 October 1994 to 31 January 1995.[BACK](#)

36. "Army Spokesman Announces End of Rio Operation," *Agencia Estado* (Sao Paulo: 2 February 1995), as translated in FBIS-LAT-95-023.[BACK](#)

37. The common translation of *favelas* as "slums" belie a wide variety of situations. Traditionally, Brazilian city authorities have tried to move the *favelas* to outlying areas. These policies are changing. In Rio and Sao Paulo, for example, city government is bringing sewer, water and electric power to the favelas along with clinics and police posts. Today there is a wide range of conditions in the *favelas*, from small and simple homes with television, refrigerator and running water (and perhaps a car outside), to primitive tin and cardboard shacks. Most people

living in the *favelas* are poor, but honest working people. As expected, the overall poverty invites criminal activities.[BACK](#)

38. General Zenildo Lucena, Minister of the Army, in "Army Minister Comments on Rio Action," *O Globo*, Rio de Janeiro, 29 November 1994, as translated in FBIS-LAT-94-232.[BACK](#)

39. "Drug Trafficker Expands Control Despite Rio Operation," *Folha De Sao Paulo*, 26 January 1995, as translated in JPRS-TDD-95-003-L.[BACK](#)

40. "Nothing Will Be Like It Was Before," *Jornal Do Brasil*, 26 January 1995, p. 8, as translated in JPRS-TDD-95-006-L.[BACK](#)

41. Brazilian citizens suspected of criminal activities could be incarcerated for 30 days (plus a 30 day extension if warranted).[BACK](#)

42. Happy Carvalho and Claudio Renalto, "Army Patrols Mark Beginning of Operation Rio-2," *Agencia Estado* (Sao Paulo: 3 April 1995), as translated in FBIS-LAT-95-066. According to Eastern Military Command Colonel Ivan Cardozo, the goal of Rio-2 was to maintain a troop presence in the city. Troops were "carrying out operations in Niteroi District, one of the main escape routs for drug traffickers and smugglers in the state."[BACK](#)

43. Camara Senna, Brigadier General, Brazilian Army, interview and discussion with author at Foreign Military Studies Office (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: 24 July 1995).[BACK](#)

44. "Navy Gets German-Made Patrol Boat for Rio-2 Operation," *Jornal do Brasil*, Rio De Janeiro, 29 April 1995, p.18, as translated in JPRS-TDD-95-016-L (Narcotics).[BACK](#)

45. "States Join Anticrime Operation in Rio de Janeiro," *Brasilia Voz do Brasil Network*, 2100GMT, 8 November 1994, as translated in JPRS-TDD-94-047-L (Narcotics).[BACK](#)

46. Task Force Commander, nonattribution interview by author, at Headquarters, Land Force Command (COTER), Brasilia, Brazil, April 26, 1996. [BACK](#)

47. Senna interview. A review of the news stories about Operation Rio indicate overall public favor, and that the operation was successful, if only on a limited and temporary basis.[BACK](#)